

Gaithersburg Day Laborer Task Force Meeting  
Tuesday, January 31, 2006, 7:30 p.m.  
Casey Community Center, Room A

I. Approval of Summary of 1/24/06 meeting

**A motion was made to approve the summary of the January 24, 2006 meeting. The motion passed.**

II. Dialogue with Members of the Day Laborer Work Force

Chair Prentiss Searles thanked the day laborers in attendance for their willingness to participate in the meeting and introduced Karina Hartman, a certified translator, with whom the City contracted for translation services. He also prefaced the discussion with a reminder for all in attendance to be respectful of one another's opinions, noting that silence does not signal agreement, just respect. It was explained to the day laborers that one of the charges of the task force was to provide options to address the current situation and to do that effectively, they would need to understand the needs of the day laborers. As the day laborers declined an offer to make any opening remarks, the Chair proceeded to ask a list of questions prepared by the task force. The following questions were posed to the group of approximately 13 day laborers:

**What part of the City do you currently reside in (or list nearby town of residence)?**

- Gaithersburg
- Deer Park
- Washington Grove
- North Summit Avenue

**How did you decide to settle in the Gaithersburg, MD area?**

- Had family members in Gaithersburg
- Read article at the Spanish Catholic Center that it was one of the best cities in which to live
- There were many Latinos in the area
- City is progressive and provides a lot of opportunities

**Do you have a wife and children living with you in Gaithersburg?**

- Yes. Wives, husbands, children.

**How long have you been a day laborer?**

- 1 year
- 2 years in Gaithersburg (but sporadic). Does ceramic and stonework as well as building bridges. When this work is not available, looks for

employment as a day laborer.

- If sent home on slow day from a regular job will seek day labor work to fill in gaps

**Why do you go to the temporary day labor (parking lot) site?**

- We go wherever we hear there are jobs. That is the only way that we have found to get a job.

**Why do you not go to an employment agency to get work?** (*Prentiss noted that there were temporary employment centers in the area such as Labor Ready on Shady Grove Road.*)

- The pay is very low - \$6-7 per hour. You can't even pay rent on that money. In answer to a follow up question it was noted that workers are getting better than \$6.50 as day laborers.
- There is no way to be contacted if a job becomes available. The Spanish Catholic Center used to provide their number as a contact number. Now, day laborers have no way to be reached.

**Have you experienced not getting paid per agreement?**

- Usually the problem is that the agreement is to be paid \$10 per hour for a 10-hour job, but the workers will be required to work 12 hours and still only get paid for 10.
- Sometimes they get paid with personal checks that bounce.
- One individual was hired, for what was described as a permanent job, by someone who represented themselves as a subcontractor for Comcast. The individual worked a full week and didn't get paid.

**What resources do you need or skills do you need to learn in order to find permanent, skilled employment?**

- The greatest obstacle for day laborers is the language barrier. We need help with learning/understanding the language.

**Do you want a center that will also provide social services such as English classes and counseling regarding health, safety and legal matters? Are you aware that English classes are available at no cost at the public library?**

- Day laborers would like a center with those features but would like training for their abilities. It was noted that the work in this country is much different and uses a lot of machinery.
- It is also very important to have a health services and health education center.
- English classes offered at the public library are not really like a class. It is like group conversations. Want more formalized instruction.

- Public schools have English classes but most of the time they are full.
- Classes are offered only once or twice a week. Would like to be able to go everyday.
- Some individuals try to learn on their own but say it is very important to have a teacher explain as they don't understand the books.
- One worker noted that she goes to the library and gets audio cassettes in order to learn English and also participates in English classes offered through her church.

**How are you made aware of currently available services?**

- Announcements on T.V. and radio and through flyers in Spanish stores.
- Word-of-mouth.

**Are there community services that your family is currently using that are in need of improvement?**

- Relied on Spanish-Catholic Center but now they are busy and always very full.
- Child receiving tutoring at United Methodist Church (in front of Food Lion). Would like to see more regular offerings for tutoring rather than just Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- Grace United Methodist Church has been providing hot chocolate, coffee and sandwiches.

**Why are the day laborers moving from Grace to 7-Eleven and Duron Paint store?**

- Day laborers that stay at Duron are the best painters. They are picked up there by contractors/subcontractors.
- Day laborers only have permission to remain at Grace Church until 9:30 a.m, so then they move to 7-Eleven.

**If there was a day laborer center, would it be able to be designated the only place from which laborers could be picked up?**

- No problem. As long as it was communicated to the contractor/subcontractor and they knew we were there waiting for them.
- It would need to be located in an appropriate place, not far away from the City and would need to be easy for contractors to access.

**Task Force heard that some day laborers come from as far away as Langley Park?**

- Langley Park is full. There are too many day laborers (est. 80-100). There are fewer here.
- The majority of day laborers are from Gaithersburg.

**People in Damascus say if a day laborer center is built in Gaithersburg, people from Damascus will come here. Do you think that will be the case?**

- Impossible. There are more opportunities in Damascus than here. North of Damascus and Mount Airy, they are constructing a lot of houses. There are many jobs there. Damascus does not have a day laborer problem.

**Is there a site in Damascus where day laborers are gathering?**

- No. There is no site. They have jobs.

**What do you do during the day after 9:00 a.m. when you are required to leave the 7- Eleven and in the evenings?**

- Usually we are told we will get picked up at 9:30 a.m. so we wait until the appointed time. If we get no job, we go home.
- Worker reported being offered two jobs today and had to choose.
- If not hired, goes to restaurant to look for work.
- If no work, goes back to sleep.
- If no work, rides bike.

**How would you get to the center?**

- Majority would walk
- Bicycle (one person)
- Drive (one person)
- Ride the bus (if they have the money)

**Do you have a Maryland driver's license?**

- Some day laborers have licenses and some do not. The Motor Vehicle Administration asks for too much documentation.

**Approximately how many day laborers are there at the existing site?**

- Approximately 50. Many did not come tonight due to lack of transportation.

**What type of day labor do women do?**

- Clean houses
- Work in restaurants
- Baby sit
- Paint
- Deliver papers
- Drive trucks

**Where would you like to be in a year or two?**

- Regarding location
  - Living here
- Regarding job
  - Learning English
  - Having permanent job
  - Owning a business

**Do you want a day labor center? Why does Gaithersburg need a day labor center?**

- Yes. Because we all live in the Gaithersburg area and a center will be more organized and demand will be better.
- We need a center. There are a lot of Latinos in the area. 90% of the bus riders are Latino.
- Would be good to have center in Gaithersburg because transportation is an issue. Additionally, there are jobs here.

**Would you prefer a day labor center with multiple training classes such as ESOL and job/skills training?**

- Yes.

**What if was just a simple shelter with porta-johns?**

- No. If there is a center there should be a training element.

**You understand that the center will have policies that include rules, regulations and laws, do you want a contractor to run the center for the foreseeable future or would you favor a plan that leads towards self-management by an association of workers?**

- Maybe a mix of contractor and a union. Feel that we do not have the level of education to run the center. Specifically, we are not well-informed enough to organize and would like shared participation with contractors.

**Do you favor a plan that leads to self-management if you could get organized?**

- We would like to have a plan to learn to self-manage. But we would need to work with someone who really knows how to run a center and is knowledgeable about the day laborer culture.

**Are you aware that Grace UMC will not be hosting day laborers past April?**

- Yes. We just found out two days ago.

**What suggestions do the workers have to help us with the work of the task force?**

- It would be helpful if the task force could visit and see what is involved in the day of a day laborer.
- A visit to the site in the morning would allow the task force to see our needs.

**What services are currently available to help obtain documented status as a US citizen?**

- We have nothing to say about that.

A clergy member in attendance responded that the Spanish Catholic Center has been providing some information but that recent immigration laws have made it much more complex and he does not believe any organization is currently providing guidance.

**Do you trust the Gaithersburg police?**

- Yes. It is comforting to see police and know they are protecting me and my children.
- Before 9:30 a.m. the police are very friendly. After 9:30 a.m., if day laborers gather in groups, they are told that they need to move along.
- Police will follow me and even walk beside me.

Task force members posed their own questions to the day laborers as follows:

**Do you have fears or concerns regarding any aspect of a future day labor center in Gaithersburg?**

- Concerned about the location, particularly in regard to transportation.

**Where do you go when your children are sick/hurt?**

-There is no place to go. Chair Prentiss Searles said that it was his understanding that individuals with serious injuries will be seen at hospitals. Workers responded that they were scared to go to the hospital because of the large bill that follows.

**Do you have immediate family in your home country? Do you Plan to stay long-term or return home?**

- Yes. We plan to stay.

**Would a day laborer center be viewed by the day laborers as serving only Hispanics or all people in need of work?**

- The center should be for everyone.

**In regard to being hired by a business versus an individual, are you more comfortable working for a business or an individual?**

-Of course we are more comfortable working for a company. They usually have vans and we write down the plate number if we don't get paid.

**If you have the tag number and don't get paid, what do you do?**

- We talk with an attorney who is consulting with CASA de Maryland. In return for assistance, day laborers are required to give 20 hours of community service, spent either working on their own cases or assisting CASA.

As the question and answer session drew to a close, the day laborers thanked the members of the task force that visited last Friday and extended an invitation to the entire task force to visit one morning. They stated that the majority of the day laborers are here to work and help the country progress. They identified the language barrier as a major obstacle but felt it was their responsibility to learn the language in order to succeed. They thanked the task for providing them the opportunity to participate in the meeting and expressed their desire for a positive outcome that would provide opportunities for everyone.

Chair Prentiss Searles informed the day laborers that the task force's recommendations were due to the Mayor and City Council by April 1 and that the task force would share those recommendations with the day laborers as soon as they were finalized.

III. Continue Review of Task Force Work Plan/Outline  
Deferred until next meeting.

IV. Subcommittee Work Schedules  
Team leaders provided the following reports:

**Subcommittee A – Build a Day Laborer Center**

Cathy Dryzygula reported that the committee has proposed February 11 and 18 as dates for day labor center visits. In addition to visiting centers run by CASA, they will also be visiting the Herndon center run by Project Hope and Harmony.

**Subcommittee B – Pass Ordinances to Prevent Soliciting Jobs from Parking Lots Public Streets and Sidewalks**

Lauren Husted noted that some of their research would be relevant to the work of Subcommittee A. She stated that there was no perfect location to site the center in Herndon because of the way it had grown, resulting in a mix of commercial and residential throughout. It was noted that there was a lot of backlash from Herndon residents regarding siting of the Herndon Day Laborer Center. Based on these findings, Lauren suggested that members of Subcommittee A talk with residents and business owners in regard to if and how existing day labor centers impact them.

### **Subcommittee C – Utilize Existing Employment Centers**

Rich Koch asked for input from fellow committee members regarding a “plan of attack” and for assistance in identifying areas for additional research.

### **Subcommittee E - Ramifications of Doing Nothing**

Dan Searles asked committee members to send him input for incorporation into the report. It was reported that a City Council Member stated that any recommendations made by the task force should be instituted very incrementally. It was noted that this line of thinking shows a lack of understanding and it should be addressed in the report.

Linda Hammond-Decker noted that she had approached both a contractor and an individual in regard to their willingness to speak with the task force as to why they use day labor. She reported that they were very responsive and willing to work with the task force. She is planning to return to the existing day laborer site to try and gather additional information early on Monday morning. A discussion ensued regarding inviting contractors or individuals who use the services of day laborers to the meeting. Some members felt that it would only be valuable if they could get a commitment by several contractors/individuals as they felt one or two people would not be representative of the larger group. It was noted that the business community would be the one that needed to co-exist with the day labor center and, as such, business owners should be invited to come to the meeting and express their views. This point was countered with the argument that inviting business owners would require an invitation to residents as well. Additionally, an earlier decision by the Task Force requiring input be provided in writing was stressed.

Task Force Chair Prentiss Searles asked for and received consensus on inviting contractors and individuals who hire day laborers to a task force meeting. In what form their information would be presented (survey, in-person) could be discussed at a subsequent meeting. Additionally, it was agreed that the procedural discussion of individuals/groups providing input at public meetings be deferred until next week.

V. Old Business  
None

VI. New Business  
Assistant City Manager Tony Tomasello distributed copies of a document submitted by Rev. Piel. It was noted that a copy of the document would be posted on the Task Force page of the City’s website.

Items for next week’s agenda:

- Continue Review of Task Force Work Plan/Outline
- Subcommittee Feedback – Outlining progress made and identifying resources needed.

- Review Draft of “Consequences of Doing Nothing”
- Procedural Discussion – regarding manner in which individuals will be invited to participate/provide input.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.